

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY,

IN ITS RELATIONS TO MODERN THOUGHT:

A LECTURE,

DELIVERED IN KNOX' COLLEGE

ON THE 5TH OCTOBER, 1870.

AT THE OPENING OF THE COLLEGE SESSION,

BY

THE REV. DAVID INGLIS,

HAMILTON, ONTARIO.

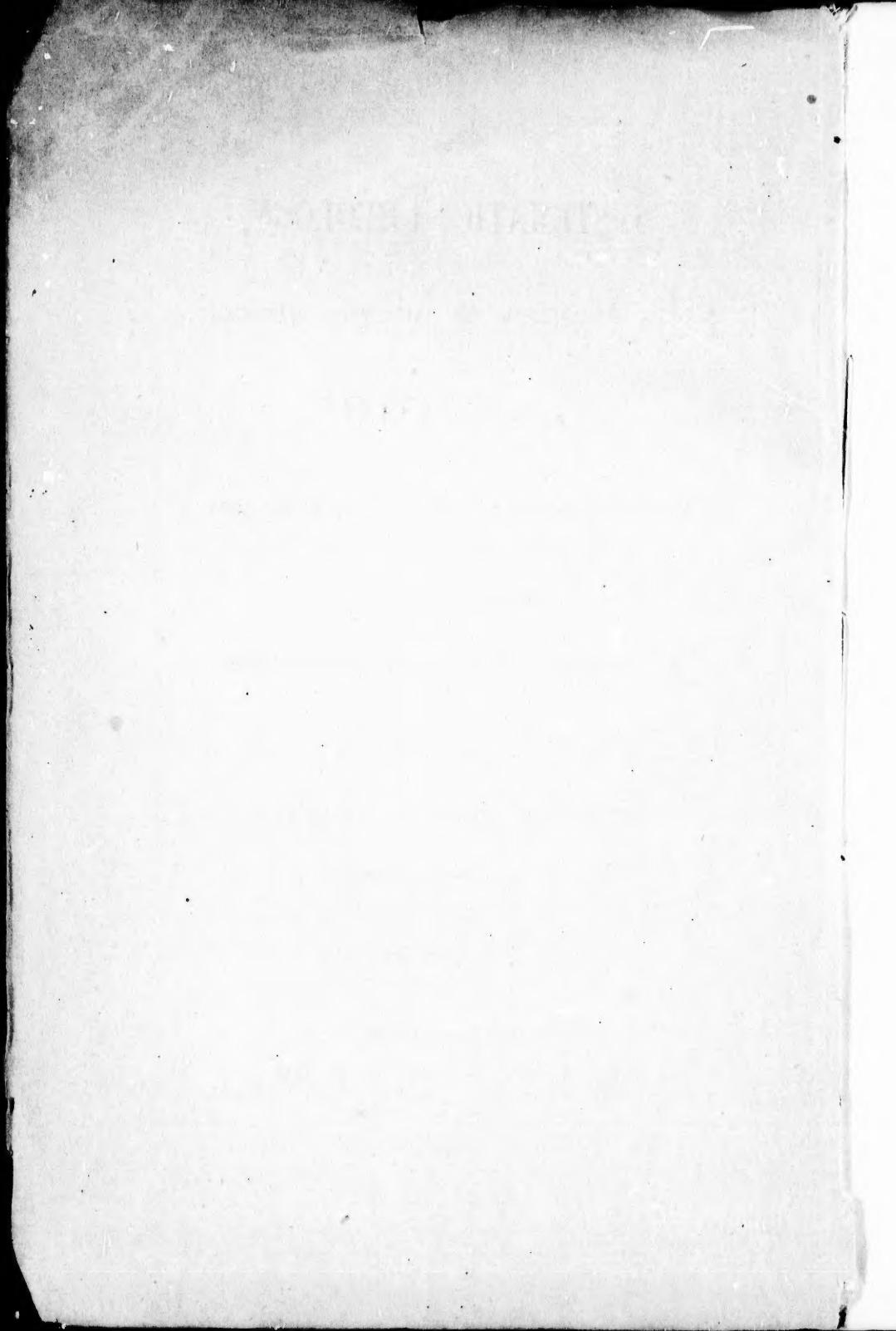
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SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY:

A LECTURE.

GENTLEMEN, STUDENTS OF KNOX COLLEGE,—

The literature of our day is flooded with all kinds of assaults against Christian doctrine. Not only in books professedly theological or philosophical, but in the lighter works of poetry and fiction, we find continual protests against the idea that Christianity contains any body or system of positive truths—the belief of which is essential to the Christian faith—the denial of which is a negation of Christianity. Dogma is used as a term of reproach, as though it were equivalent to dogmatism in the justly offensive sense in which that word is popularly used. Dogmatism signifies that disposition or habit of mind which overvalues the individual's own powers, depreciates the opinions of others, and seeks arrogantly to force assent to personal opinions as indisputably true, by a groundless assumption of authority. Dogma is to be understood not as meaning merely a doctrinal notion; it signifies a positive truth positively asserted, in opposition to an opinion or speculation. In theology it signifies a revealed truth—a statement which truly expresses the mind of God in His Word. The claim to authority does not rest upon the use of dogmatic words—upon the positiveness of the statement, but upon the proof of the authority whence it is derived. A statement may in its form be dogmatic, while devoid of the authority out of which alone dogma can properly spring; but every doctrine having a divine authority must have a dogmatic form. We claim therefore for the truths which are declared and attested by the Word of God, and which are capable of definite statement, that they are positive and authoritative, not as matters of individual opinion, but as revealed truths bearing the stamp of Divine infallibility.

It is argued that the systematizing of truth, whether for instruction or defence, as well as its technical forms, are necessarily human and therefore cannot be authoritative. The possibility of error in the process of systematizing, or in the form of statement, we grant at once, but whatever is proved to be a misconception or misstatement of the Divinely revealed truth ceases to be dogma, that is authoritative, and we are bound at once to give it up. More than this, we are not to shrink from making the examination, and if necessary making it again and again, but the truths which God has revealed are to be received as authoritative.

The questions between those who arrogantly assume to be the advanced thinkers of the nineteenth century, and those who hold fast the faith once delivered to the saints, are not such as affect merely the accuracy or inaccuracy of the systems or formulas of truth, but such as affect the existence or certainty of the truths themselves, questions affecting not the form but the substance. The disciples of this modern school do not contend for one system of truth as against another, but they deny the authority of all systems, of all positive religious beliefs. Their theory carried fully out amounts to this, that it does not matter what a man believes, there is no certain belief—no one form of religious belief is more true than another, therefore the nearest approach to truth is to reject all dogma—to sweep away all authoritative religious teaching.

It would, however, be unjust to place all the opponents of dogma in the same category, and an attempt to classify them is important to a full and candid discussion of the question.

1st. There are those who repudiate the truths of God's word from an intense aversion to the doctrines of grace—skeptics, who would retain the name of Christians, while they reject the inspired authority of the Bible. They profess to accept the pure and lofty morality of the Bible, so far as it commends itself to their consciousness, but they contemptuously reject the facts and doctrines of Christianity.

(a) Under this class we find a large number of men who, through the lighter literature of our day, aspire to be the leaders of public opinion—men of letters, who are for the most part ignorant alike of theology and philosophy, and who yet

in a flippant and supercilious tone deal with questions of the most momentous interest. They persistently teach that if men were freed from Scriptural creeds and dogmatic beliefs they would become the subjects of higher impulses, which would lead to purer forms of life. They misrepresent and caricature those types of character which have been formed under the influences of a genuine and earnest belief, and sneer complacently at the characters whom they portray as the representatives of religious men and women. These Transcendentalists would put in the room of Christian doctrine a theory of the perfectability of human nature, and its self-sufficiency in all things. The true answer to this is an appeal to the facts of human life—to their own pictures of individual life and character, even when what they call the superstitious beliefs of Christianity are wanting, which are black with the shadows of moral as well as physical evil. At this point they take refuge in the theory which sinks the individual in the mass, and maintain that what is not true of the single man is true of the aggregate of mankind. Here all is confusion, for who can conceive of a whole without parts, an aggregate without individuals, or if you will, a perfect whole made up of imperfect parts—a perfect humanity made up of individuals who are singly bad and degraded.

Let the question be asked, Whether among those who have accepted the Christian creed or among those who have not accepted it, the highest types of character have been found? The answer must be in favour of Christian doctrine; and it is surely unphilosophical, to say the least of it, to exclude those religious beliefs from having had any share in the formation of character.

Those men who speak of Christian creeds with contemptuous pity yet claim to be Christians upon the plea that Christianity is not a doctrine but a life. Their favourite motto is—

“For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight—
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right.”

As if a Christian life were a negation of Christian doctrine, or could exist in ignorance, hatred, rejection of or non-conformity to Christian truth.

(b) Differing from these novelists and essayists, yet closely allied to them in their opposition to all distinctive Christian truth, we have a school of scientific thinkers who bring to their task a multifarious if not accurate knowledge, and who are essentially polemical rather than sentimental. We refer to the small but increasing school of philosophical historians and critics who have named their system POSITIVISM. Among those who have exerted themselves to transplant the ideas of Compte into English soil we may mention Lewes and Buckle as representing the critical historians, and John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer and Alexander Bain as representing the philosophical critics. These philosophers may indeed be regarded as simply atheists, but it is impossible to overlook their influence as indicating the drift of modern speculation in philosophy, which is ever coming into contact with theology, and which, under the guise of liberal thought and philosophical criticism, is continually pressed upon our attention. This positivism claims to supersede all previous systems of philosophy, to be the final result and climax of all previous speculations, and to subject every branch of human learning and activity to the criticism of its remorseless positivity. Thoroughly materialistic in its character, it formulates results and calls them laws; beyond this it discards all knowledge and repudiates its possibility. It professes only to know phenomena and these not fully—their essential nature and their ultimate cause are alike unknown and inscrutable. It is a rigid system of secularism, restricting human thoughts to the interests of the present life, and accounting all doctrinal religion superstition. These philosophers sometimes call Christianity divine, but by this they mean nothing more than that it is a portion of the great mundane evolution, divine in the sense that all things are divine. They exclude from the domain of possible knowledge the doctrine alike of efficient and final causes; the idea of God the Creator is by them banished from the field of science; Providence is to them an absurd dogma; the true conception of history is a thing of cold algebraical laws and sequences from which we must exclude all idea of a divine and ever working purpose. These extreme, reckless and desperate conclusions are evolved from assumed

principles which are either wholly false, or partially false because they overlook other truths material to the subject. They make the limits of their own reason the bounds of the universe, and every individual man not only the measure but the sum of all things. The highest climax of positivism is the recognition and systematizing of its own ignorance. What has theology to gain from this philosophy which claims to lift us by the workings of reason into the enfranchisement of thought? Its last result is a pure negative, inconceivable and impossible, a hideous gulph of absurdity. What a result for a theory put forth with such an air of superior insight and ostentatious promise of freeing metaphysics and theology from the perplexities of previous speculations, and placing them on their own proper and immutable basis!

Can all that Sage, Saint, Sophist ever writ,
Rebuild this tower, this tenement refit?

2nd. We have another large class of men of a totally different stamp, whom it would be unjust to rank with those already described, but who are, perhaps without knowing it, playing into their hands, and who designate themselves as the school of Liberal Theologians. Writers of this school pervert and overstrain the contrast between letter and spirit, they maintain that the Bible is not as a whole a Revelation from God, but that it contains a Revelation; or they change the way of putting it and declare that individual passages of Scripture have no authority, we must take their whole spirit.

This theory admits of many different modifications. There is a large class of theologians who refer the contents of Scripture to the natural revelation—they are the embodiment of the religious consciousness of their various writers. The authors of the books of the Bible were in a certain sense inspired; but the inspiration which its writers possessed did not differ in principle from the inspiration of Homer or Dante or Shakespeare. The inspiration might differ in degree, and it did differ in that the writings themselves refer to a different class of subjects, but in principle it was the same as the inspiration of genius through which the loftier spirits of our race have in all ages thrown out great and noble ideas—sparks of heavenly

light received we know not how. Another school regard inspiration as the result, not of the natural, but of the gracious agency of God, illuminating the spiritual consciousness of the writers, so that out of the fulness of their own understanding and feeling they wrote the product of their own religious lives and beliefs. The writers of the New Testament differ from ordinary Christian authors only in this, that they stood nearer to Christ personally. While recognizing the difference between Wegscheider and Baur, between Parker and Maurice, between Schleiermacher and Neander, yet that difference is to be found rather in the devoutness of the spirit with which such men as Neander and Maurice approach the Scriptures than in the fundamental theory of inspiration. The inspiration which they all contend for is purely a subjective one; the one assign inspiration to the natural and the other to the gracious agency of God; but both deny the presentation of supernatural truth from without; both reduce the Scriptures to the level of the religious authorship of ordinary men; both reject the idea of a supernatural revelation or of infallible truth, and thus reduce all theological enquiry to the same level with philosophical speculation. On such a theory dogmatic truth is an impossibility. There is no authoritative or infallible system of religious teaching. The logical conclusion of this theory is that consciousness is the ultimate and absolute revelation of God in man, and that we could for ourselves have attained all that is revealed in the Scriptures, though, but for the Scriptures, we might have been slower in attaining it.

It is contended that there is a religious sentiment or instinct in man, and that this is the only essential and eternal reality in religion. The existence of a religious sentiment in man, is undeniable. But for this religious sentiment there could be no conception of God—and consequently no belief in a revelation from God. When however we come to ask what this religious sentiment amounts to, we find that it has in itself no power to deliver us from endless contradictions and monstrous errors, atheistic, polytheistic and pantheistic. A subjective emotion with no objective reality to answer to it must be unsubstantial and unreal, and can never be the religion of rational beings. We grant that emotions are often so subtle that we

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cannot analyze them—but somewhere or other there must exist realities to which the emotions correspond, and in the absence of the knowledge of these realities the feelings themselves must die. If then these realities exist and are known to exist, we are at once led out of our own consciousness. If they do not exist it follows that the sentiment is unreal—a creation of the imagination. *Hence the necessity of a clear objective rule of faith and life.* Religion never has existed, and cannot exist without a creed. But it is argued that there is a natural insight into divine things which, were the dogmas of Christianity swept away, would give to man a freer, purer and nobler creed. What then has this natural insight actually given? Rationalism has not given us a single truth which is not found in the Bible. It has no religious creed of its own. Up to a certain point the rationalist affirms, and then he begins to deny; but so far as he affirms, he only states what the Scriptures teach; it is at the point at which he begins to deny that his teachings differ from those of the Bible. Even his affirmations are for the most part loose and one-sided, but so far as they have any positive element in them they are contained in the Word of God. Take as an example the views of the Pantheist. He maintains that a divine life and energy pervades the universe. In every atom of matter, in every organized existence, in every throb of life, God is to be found. All this the Bible expresses in a single sentence, when it says, "In Him we live and move and have our being." When the Bible goes on to refer this universal pervasiveness of life to God—a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, conscious, intelligent and self-existent—then the Rationalist comes with his denial, and substitutes an unsubstantial abstraction, fearful in its very negation of personality. Intuitions have not lead men into the knowledge of the true God. *Hence the necessity of a revelation.* That which belongs to man and to this creation may be known through the senses, through reasoning, or through the testimony of man; but the things of God—divine truths and thoughts, God alone can make known, consequently man must be ignorant of them unless God reveal them.

It is argued that God has implanted in us a conscience, and has enthroned it as absolute judge and arbiter of truth, by

which all doctrines must be tested. Lecky in his history of Rationalism puts it thus, "Men have come instinctively and almost unconsciously to judge all doctrines by their intuitive sense of right, and to reject or explain away, or throw into the background those that will not bear the test, no matter how imposing may be the authority that authenticates them." Thus the moral faculty is made supreme over all other authority. The conscience is made the supreme judge of religious truth, and no doctrine can be admitted which the individual conscience does not sanction, however plainly it may be taught in the Word of God. Some for example object to the doctrine of atonement because it teaches the imputation of the guilt incurred by sinners to the Holy Jesus of Nazareth; this offends their sense of right and wrong, and they must either find some explanation of it or reject the professed revelation which contains it. Here without doing more than notice the fact that this representation of the doctrine is false because only partially stated; we remark that to say that God is not to be or do so and so is *a priori* reasoning of the most objectionable kind, it measures what God ought to be or do by the standard of human thought. "Thou thoughtest," saith God, "that I was altogether such a one as thyself." The argument proceeds on a total misconception of the nature of conscience; it is not an active energy that gives existence to views and beliefs, and invests them with authority; it is a regulative faculty, which decides on the lawfulness or unlawfulness of our actions and affections and instantly approves or condemns them. Throughout the entire Scriptures there is the recognition of the individual conscience, existing prior to a positive revelation, which is the supreme moral guide within the soul; but it is not independent and infallible—"like other parts of the human soul it exhibits the weakness of a dependent and corrupt creature." The imperfections and perversions of the natural conscience are undeniable—it needs to be quickened and enlightened and educated; and to make it the judge of truth, the measure and arbiter of faith, is to transfer it out of its proper sphere, and to ascribe to it powers which it is quite incompetent to exercise. Hence the necessity of *an authoritative rule of faith*

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and life. Such a rule is found in the Scriptures so long as they are accepted as the infallible revelation of God's truth; but once leave openings for qualifications and exceptions, and their whole force is weakened, with the necessary result of plunging us either into the cold negative scepticism of the rationalist, or into the wild mysticism of the fanatic whose faith is guided and directed by the perverted shadows of his own mind. We may indeed in such an awful extremity yield ourselves unconditionally to the authority and throw ourselves into the arms of an infallible Church. But here again extremes meet, and we find ourselves however unexpectedly among the rationalists once more; for the papist deprecates the authority of the Bible, declaring that the Church does not derive authority from the Scriptures, but gives authority to them. For all this she can claim no proofs beyond her own existence, her own experiences, and her own affirmation; her arguments like those of the pantheist are purely subjective. "That the Church is the infallible oracle of truth is the fundamental dogma of the (Roman) Catholic religion"—but when asked for the proofs of this it resolves itself into a mere human speculation. It is true that Rationalism and Popery are apparently antagonistic, but they are not opposed to each other in the radical principles from which they spring, or in the results to which they tend. Like the adverse systems of the Pharisees and Sadducees of old they may be traced to the same source, an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, and they tend mutually rather to develop than to destroy one another.

We are not however to ignore reason, or even to deprecate it in the supposed interest of faith, but we maintain that the indisputable authority of Holy Scripture, and this alone, presents us with the constituents of a faith which satisfies the conscience, elevates the affections, and assumes authoritatively to govern the life and temper. If we deny that the sacred writings are entitled to exercise a determinative authority, we must be content to remain without any settled religious opinions, or we must frame a creed for ourselves; and if we try to do this, it will end, not in a creed that meets our wants, and satisfies our spiritual nature, but in blank dreary negations and endless con-

traditions and cold indifferentism. If Christianity be a revelation at all, then the sacred writers were divinely commissioned to reveal it, and it must be authoritative, therefore it is our duty ingenuously and fearlessly to submit ourselves to the guidance of the Bible. We know God as he reveals himself to us through his works, his acts, his words. True there are limitations to our knowledge of divine things, but these limitations lie either in the subjects themselves, which are inaccessible to us, as in the mode of the divine subsistence; or in the discoveries which God has been pleased to make of himself which fall below what he might if he pleased reveal to us; or in the narrowness of our powers which are unable to grasp all that he has revealed. There is no contradictoriness in the great facts and truths of natural and revealed religion; for as all truths are self-consistent and consistent with each other if they are truly known, a seeming self-subversion, or mutual contradiction, can only be the effect of misapprehension on our part. Many truths of natural and revealed religion are within our grasp, others are inaccessible to us. To discriminate these from each other, and to ascertain the nature of those truths which lie within the sphere of our understanding, are exercises which demand impartial, earnest, and thorough investigation, and these investigations must be conducted, not on *a priori* grounds of assumed or imagined reason, but by the inductive and deductive processes which we employ in other branches of knowledge in the use of the powers with which God has endowed us, and of all the light which he has vouchsafed us in his word and through his works.

The place and functions of reason must be defined. If no doctrine can stand upon the testimony of revelation alone, unless it is supported or corroborated by the independent testimony of reason, then reason becomes the ultimate basis of our faith in revelation, and every doctrine of revelation must rest ultimately upon reason otherwise it has no basis at all. So that when a truth is accepted it is accepted, not because God has revealed it, but because man has concurred in it—reason must be able to understand it, to see the ground and reasons of it, and to stamp it with its approval before it can be accepted as true. Christian faith is exchanged for common convic-

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tion, and man believes only himself when he is professing to believe God. On the other hand we must give to reason its true place. In the language of Locke, "He that takes away reason to make way for revelation puts out the light of both, and does much the same as if he would persuade a man to put out his eyes, the better to receive the remote light of an invisible star by a telescope." But reason is out of its true place when it demands of us to surrender a genuine doctrine of revelation. Here we are called to distinguish well and warily between God's truth and man's interpretation, between divine verities and human opinions—we may willingly part with opinions, but it is the highest office of reason to grasp firmly the truth divine.

3rd. There is still another school of theologians who grant the fact of a revelation, but who object to Christian dogmas, and who represent a plain statement of the doctrines of the Bible as opposed to a devotional faith. Christianity we are told must abandon the pretension to offer a fixed, sharply defined body of truth to the acceptance or rejection of the mind of man. Thus one writes, "Any one who has ever read his Bible in the hope of learning something of the divine lessons which it teaches, necessarily and unconsciously abstracts his mind from the mere words, and still more from the outlines of facts, in order to fix it on the sacred meaning which underlies them. Devotional reading is a thing apart from and incompatible with historical study. The absorption of the spirit of the Bible, is not consistent with the absorption of the facts into the memory."* Here we concede at once that the devotional reading of the Bible is one thing, and the historical or doctrinal study of the Bible is another; but to say that they are things inconsistent and incompatible is to sweep away not only all theology but also all study of the Bible. However such sentiments may be expressed, there is at the foundation of this opposition to dogma, the feeling that however beautiful Christianity may be it does not contain settled and fixed truths; as a poem, "its utterances flowing in a ceaseless rhythm of antitheses," such men will study it, and love it and learn from it, and it will "breathe upon the character

* R. F. Clarke, M.A., as quoted by Archdeacon Jones.

a soft and elevating influence," but it must not exact intellectual homage. To value dogma is contrasted with setting a value on Christian character and Christian life. From the very nature of the case these objections to dogma are unfounded. Those who believe that a divine revelation has been given must believe that it contains facts and doctrines which can be stated in language—and the truths thus stated cannot be contrasted with morality, as if morality were antagonistic to truth.

Another writer of the same school says, "We are not the apologists of your old systems of theology—your dogmatic teachings, your stereotyped theology. This is to give up the spirit for the letter. It is to go back to form. We must get away from everything so narrow and confined, and seek for the glorious liberty of the spiritual world."* Again the same writer says, "By truth we mean not the mere letter of Scripture, not any set form of words, no particular dogma, or creed, or article of faith. This hitherto has been the grand mistake." Such writers repudiate the idea of assailing any of the fundamental principles of revealed religion, but their sentiments carried out to their logical conclusions empty revelation of all positive value. The error lies in losing sight of the intimate and inseparable connection between the letter and the spirit. "The words which I speak unto you," said our Lord, "they are spirit and they are life." True we must get beneath the mere letter, that we may get at the spirit and reality which the written word expresses. In doing this we get at the very doctrines and articles of faith which are stigmatized as the stereotyped letter in opposition to the spirit. The historical and critical study of the Bible must ever be conducted in view of the fact that it is God's truth we are studying—that the Holy Spirit speaking through the Holy Scriptures is the real author of the doctrines. These truths are the instruments through which the same divine spirit quickens the soul, and then carries on the work of sanctification. Nor can we conceive how an intelligent and moral being such as man, in his known moral condition, can be wrought upon save through his powers of thought and reflection, of impression and feeling.

* Dr. Ferguson's Sacred Studies.

exact intellect with setting a limit. From the time are unfounded. Religion has been based on doctrines which when stated cannot be antagonistic. We are not the advocates of our dogmatical system. We give up the old dogma. We must get rid of it and seek for a new one. We gain the same result by a letter of interpretation or a new dogma, or even the grand principle of sailing any of them. But their sentiments are not to be got beneath the surface of reality which is at the very bottom of the historical record. The historical record is projected in view of the question—that the word of God is the real truth. The instruments of the soul, and can we consider man, in his relation through his mind and feeling.

It would be perhaps unfair to charge those writers with using the 'cant' of the day, that they may appear to be abreast of the so-called advanced thought. We may therefore regard them as honestly attempting to fashion Christianity into conformity with the notions and tastes which distinguish this modern thought, but this cannot be done by depreciating the truth which endureth from generation to generation. Such a course is like that of a man who destroys the steps of the ladder by which he proposes to climb. They may say that it is to the formulas of theology, to the dogmatic expression of truth, or to technical theological terms, they object, not to the truth itself. To this we say, if the word of God does mean something, it is surely right to say what it means, so to express it that it may reach the understanding and the heart. Doctrines to be authoritative must rest on the direct and positive assertions of God's word, or they must be clear and unmistakable deductions from such direct assertions. This alone renders doctrine binding on the conscience. Theology originates no doctrines, it is not a speculative science. We receive the divine declarations as the ultimate facts of theology, in the same way in which the ultimate facts of nature become the basis of natural philosophy. In theology the recorded facts are contained in the Bible, the data rest on the authority of inspiration. A statement may be questioned as to whether it is scriptural or not, but if scriptural it acquires the force of certain and demonstrated truth. The man who denies the authority of the Bible may indeed raise a thousand other questions, but the doctrines, so far as they represent the truths of the Scriptures, stand or fall with the Scriptures themselves. The difficulties of sincere doubters can thus be met only by bringing them back to the divine authority of the word of God—set that aside and faith is impossible, doubt is inevitable.

Here the objector may ask, Why generalise and systematise these divine truths at all, why not rest content with the Scriptures as you find them? To this we answer that, as in nature so in revelation, God has given us the data and left it to us to formulate and methodise them. We do not object to Geology because the facts relative to the strata must be gathered by

observation and compared and tested by corresponding results of other observers, before these can be classified. So while man could never have discovered the doctrines of Christianity without a revelation, man can gather them and arrange them in scientific order, and the very form in which they are given serves to direct and stimulate us in this the highest exercise of our powers. As for theological terms, these are simply used for clearness and brevity, and so far as they express the truths of God's word, and no better words can be found to do the same office, it is sheer nonsense to object to them. But it is objected that "by these doctrines, dogmatically expressed and systematically arranged, we overlay the truths of Christianity and interfere with intellectual freedom." Here the doctrines are assumed, though not stated in terms, to be untrue, for truth cannot "overlay" truth. If you admit that the revealed doctrines are true, why not state them dogmatically? It is replied that in this form they check independence of thought. This is true so far, for if we admit the truth of a doctrine, we are certainly not at liberty to deny it, or even to ignore it. Independence in the sense of owing allegiance to no fixed truth is a dream. The revelations of Scripture claim to be God's truth; they are this, or they are falsehoods. We protest against the method of discrediting them beforehand by denouncing their dogmatic form as opposed to freedom. If true, loyalty to truth demands that we bow reverently before them. We are not upholding the cause of a narrow mechanical orthodoxy, we believe that the Church may be the recipient of all that is really valuable in the higher criticism of the age, and that there is range enough in her for the highest culture which man can attain. A definite standard of truth and a definite system of theology stimulates thought and gives a firm foundation by which thought can rise. Inquiry in order to be effective must have some rule or standard by which it is to be directed and determined, and certainly there is larger room for all that is worthy of the name of freedom within the limits of a loving submission to the revealed will of God, than in the bondage to human philosophies which would strip theology alike of vital strength and distinctive meaning, and leave no room for any radical distinction between truth and error.

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4th. Lastly we notice very briefly the theological writers belonging to the various schools of Separatists who object to what they call human dogmas and confessions and systems. In reference to the Independents of England and the Congregationalists of this country, from among whom have arisen many of our wisest, noblest, and most Scriptural theologians, they object to confessions or subordinate church standards on the following grounds. (a) That all confessions proceed on the supposition that the Bible is not sufficient. (b) That they repress or interfere with the free and full study of the Bible by declaring beforehand what a man must believe. (c) That they engender disputes and produce divisions. We reply that our confession, and indeed all Protestant confessions, declare as a fundamental doctrine that the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and that the Supreme Judge by which all controversies in religion are to be determined is the Holy Scriptures. Scripture is at once the only source of our confession, and the only standard by which it is to be tried and measured. In the confession itself we have the clear statement of the rightful supremacy of the Scriptures. The need for creeds and confessions grows out of the duty of the church to bear testimony to the truth as against prevailing errors. Practically even those denominations who protest against them, have understood if not written confessions, so that for example no minister who denies the doctrine of our Lord's Divinity can remain in their communion. Without a standard or confession in some shape, discipline would be impossible. Our confessions do not come saying to a man *thou must believe*, but rather asking him 'dost thou believe?' Nor is it true that confessions produce divisions, though they sometimes manifest their existence. But we refer rather to other bodies of Separatists who strongly denounce creeds, confessions and systems as merely human traditions, preparatory to a vigorous effort to make their own narrow and one-sided views dominant over the minds of men. We of course do not object to the fact that they have a positive body of truths as really systematized as Calvin's Institutes; but we do protest against their habit of condemning the evangelical systems of truth as scholastic and philosophical and human theories, instead of bring-

ing them to the acknowledged standard of God's word. Their inconsistency consists in this, that while they use the cant of the day against what they call human doctrine and doctrinal systems, they take a position in reference to their own views at once polemical and propagandist ; while crying out against sects they are of all men the most sectarian ; while depreciating so-called sectarian creeds, they announce with a fierce dogmatism a system of their own, which differs from the other evangelical creeds mainly in this, that they maintain and develope certain favourite dogmas until other doctrines are cast into the shade, forgotten, and virtually if not actually denied ; so contrasting most unfavourably with the catholicity of thought and feeling, the earnestness and depth, the strength and breadth of that great evangelical system which is embodied in the subordinate standards of our Church. We protest against the demand to lay aside the embodiment of the theological and scriptural learning of the past only to give place to the tyranny of men of loose and one-sided views, which are worthless save in so far as they grasp the principles of the very theology which they professedly seek to subvert, and which alike in practical scope and spiritual tendency are narrow, exclusive, and intolerant.

I would now seek in a very few words to gather up the positive results of our enquiry.

1. There is no consistent medium between the reception of the Bible as the word of God, and therefore of infallible authority, and the rationalism of Morrell and others, who regard themselves as being as much inspired, especially in their moments of superior illumination, as Isaiah or Paul were. We cannot of course enter here on the evidences of the divinity of Christianity as a whole, but we simply state that the historical facts and documents of Christianity are proved with an amount of evidence such as no other universally believed fact and universally acknowledged book has any evidence to compare with, and if they are proved they show that the Bible is divine. The antagonistic will of man has ever been in opposition to the claims of a holy God which it presents ; it has met with opposition from hostile heathens and unbelieving Jews, from philosophical adversaries and heretical corruptors, and it has

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been tested no less by the absurdities of foolish advocates; every document and fact has been scrutinised, and yet its history and its doctrines have been established even by those opposing them. Nor does the authority of Scripture depend upon what human learning and industry have accomplished. As we distinguish the products of human art from the works of God in which his eternal power and Godhead are manifest, so the word of God bears proofs that it is His, in marked distinction from every utterance of human thought. It is impossible to suppose that man invented the ideas of God glorious in His holiness, of a Law which flashes condemnation on his sin, and of a Gospel which lays his pride in the dust. Yet the Gospel as revealed by God gives glory to God in the highest, while it saves men to the uttermost. It comes with its own evidence in perfect adaptation to the wants of man, like light in its perfect adaptation to the eye. What then do the Scriptures claim to be? What do they demand of us? What do they teach regarding inspiration? "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." "I certify you, brethren," says the Apostle Paul, "that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man, for I neither received it of man neither was I taught it but by revelation of Jesus Christ." We take our stand on the broad and unqualified declaration that the Bible, as originally given, is the word of God, divine and therefore authoritative and infallible. Faith viewed as compliance with divine authority—the obedience of faith, can only rest on this, that the word believed is God's, and faith receives it, and rests on it, just because it is God's word. Theology thus finds its data in the expressed will of God. The whole fabric of creeds and doctrines rests on this truth. It gives authority to our preaching, and is the only true ground of assurance to believers. The Bible is no development of human sentiment, no series of flashes of the intuitions, but a revelation of God delivered to us through the instrumentality of its inspired writers, and invested with the attributes of its divine Author—unity, perfection and immutability.

2. The truths of the Bible are one in that organic and structural unity which pervades it as a completed whole. There is a unity of design, a completeness of structure in the Scriptures,

notwithstanding the fact that they were given at sundry times, and in diverse manners, which proves that they have one Author whose controlling thought and knowledge run through them all. Systematic theology, recognizing this unity, reduces the scattered truths of revelation to the scientific form of a connected system. Recognizing the fundamental principle that the only authoritative rule is the word of God, and that the Scriptures are to be interpreted according to the ordinary laws by which the meaning of any other book is to be ascertained, it exhibits clearly the doctrines taught by revelation and forms them into a system; but the system is not arbitrary; it rests on the fact that there is an actual sequence and coherence in the doctrines themselves—a connection so close that the omission or misconception of one truth extends its influence through the whole system.

"Take from the harmony a single tone,
A single tint take from the Iris' bow,
And lo! what once was all, is nothing; while
Fails to the lovely whole one tint or tone."

The truths thus systematized rest mainly on the positive and direct assertions of God's Word. We have first the texts of Scripture—then the comparison of the texts with each other—and then the result in the theological formula; but this last is simply the assertion of the truth ascertained. We at the same time acknowledge that what is proved by good and necessary inference is equally binding with what is directly written; but there may be uncertainty about the process of deduction, which does not exist in the inductive method, and hence theology mainly proceeds by the latter process. It may be said that, however each separate doctrine may be proved to be scriptural, yet the order in which they are arranged in the system cannot claim this divine authority. This is true only in so far as the order is not itself indicated in Scripture, but it is the duty of the theologian to seek not only for scriptural authority for the doctrines themselves, but equally for the order in which he states them—for the links by which he binds them; and he cannot claim authority for his reasoning except in so far as he derives it from God's word. In connecting the doctrines together and exhib-

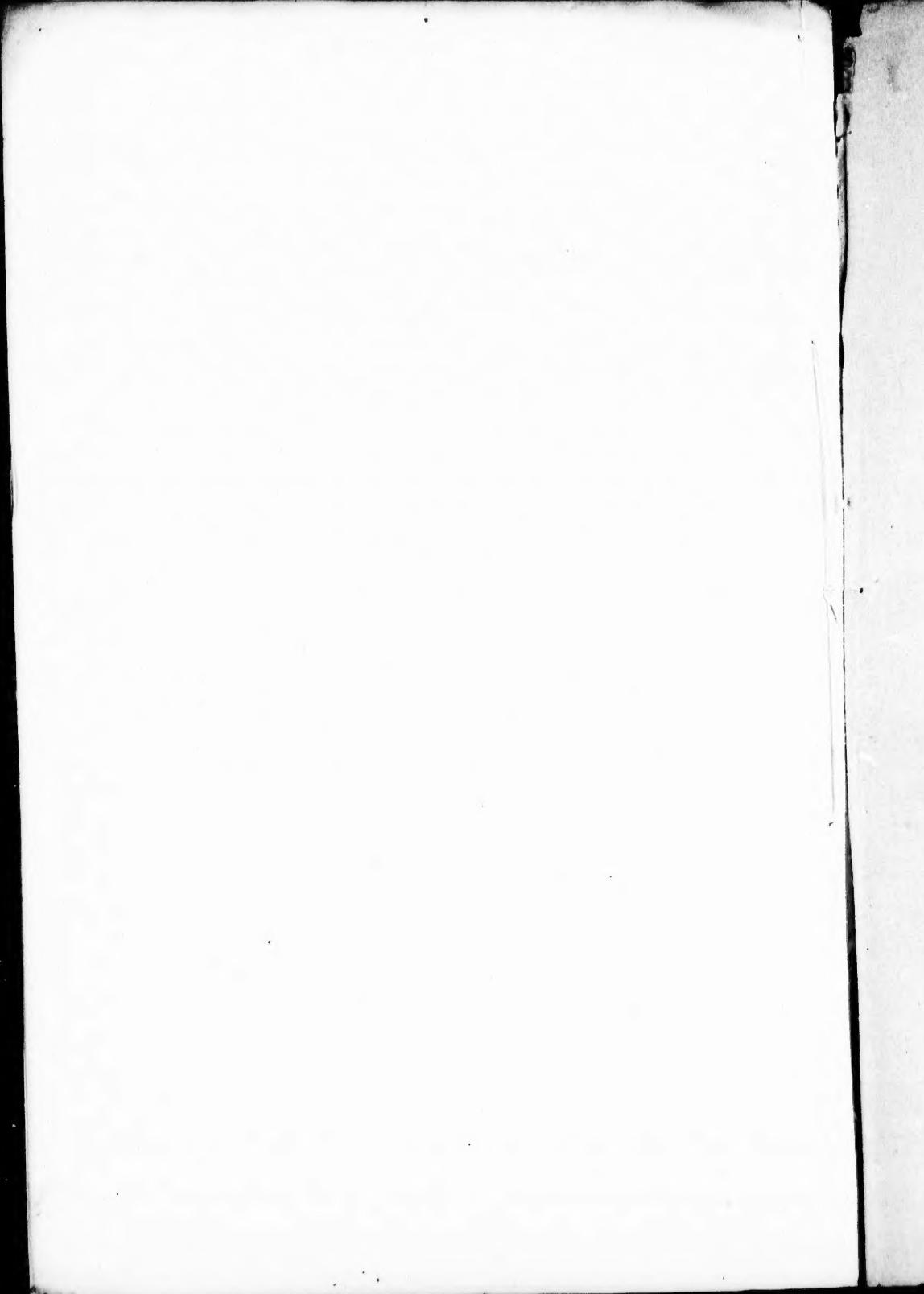
iting them as a system, the Bible must still be our authority. There may here be required a number of links and a sustained course of reasoning, but unless the connection is either directly asserted or clearly deduced from direct assertions, it is of no authoritative force. From overlooking this Mr. Mansell, in his *Limits of Religious Thought*, has wholly mistaken the authority and province of dogmatic theology, and has represented the method of theology as though it were the same with the methods of Rationalistic speculation.

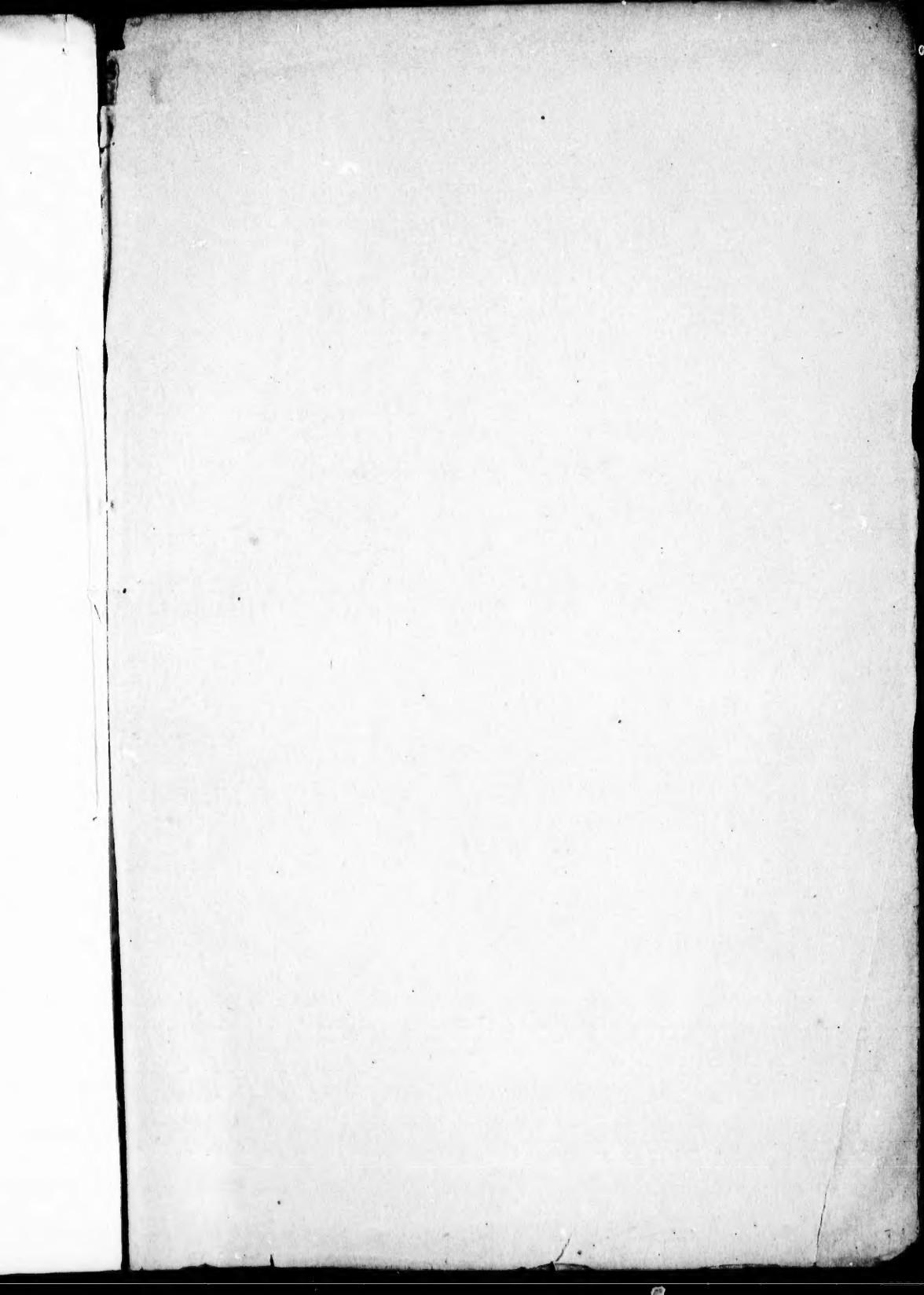
It is again urged that Theology having formed its system, views all religious truths in the light of that system. This is so far true, we cannot help using ascertained truths to aid us in our study of God's Word, nor is it desirable that we should. But still we must come to God's Word, not in the spirit of those who seek to get their own preconceived notions strengthened, but simply that we may learn what is the mind of God. Exegetical theology is essential to systematic theology, in as much as our theology rests its authority on what God says in his word ; and a creed or system is not to overrule the grammatical interpretation of the ascertained text. On the other hand, no one is competent to deal with the sacred writings properly who is not familiar with the bearings of the lines of thought on the unity of the whole revealed will of God. We need not dwell on the connection between systematic theology and apologetics as this has already occupied much of our attention, but we would state that an exact and thorough study of the word of God is the best preparation for the defence of the Bible ; every advance we make in the knowledge of God's will, will fortify our faith, and enable us successfully to defend it and to seek the conviction of others.

Finally, the evangelical system of religious truth is intensely practical. Even at the risk of going beyond the special office entrusted to me, and merging the argument of the lecture into the message of the sermon, I must protest against a mere blind acquiescence in a traditional belief, against substituting the intellectual apprehension of a system, and the perception of its internal unity and coherence, for that living faith of which Christ the Saviour is the true end and object, and of which the Holy Ghost is the only efficient agent. Only by knowing

God in Christ can we see the harmony of God's revelation, and how the parts of that revelation fit into one another. This will enable us not only to state the leading doctrines of the Gospel, but to sound their depths, to fix their relative positions, and to trace their connection. We require the bold and healthy treatment of Christian doctrine in opposition to that poetic mysticism which veils the great doctrines of revealed religion, and if it does not hide at least confuses what we would like to see set forth with all possible clearness. We need too that tenderness and love which is to be found only in communion with God and Christ through the Holy Spirit. This love will make all our ministry, and especially our sermons, effective. It will save us from the dry unreal generalities, the unmeaning repetition of set phrases, and the wearying attempts at fine writing, which make so many sermons intolerable. It will give a reality to our message, that will carry the well aimed bolt straight to the mark. We need in the Church men of learning, of might, of energy, of practical wisdom, and above all of heavenly faith, men who, not content with knowing of salvation, and witnessing about it, being taught of the Spirit, know it for themselves, know what it is to have their sins washed away in Christ's blood, their hope firm in His righteousness, their condemnation nailed to His cross; who will speak not cold, heartless, unreal words about religion, but plain, earnest, practical truths. We must speak clearly and really of sin and of salvation, of heaven and of hell, of corruption and of Christ. We would desire to see a richly intellectual, but we must have a profoundly scriptural theology. Practical religion feeds not upon beautiful thoughts, but upon clearly defined certainties. Its truths must come to us not as speculations, or pictures, or views, or opinions, but as facts and doctrines of divine authority. The living Spirit works with these upon the living soul. God who commanded light out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This will give us the theology which is at once the broadest, the truest and the most noble, combined with a true sympathy with the Christian life, with the heart of Christ, with the mind that was in Christ. Gentlemen, hold fast the old truth in the love of it and in

full sympathy with it, and bring to bear upon all your studies a true breadth of mind and heart that will fit you to reproduce in your ministrations not only the teachings of Scripture, but also their fervour, their holiness and their heavenly-mindedness. "Buy the truth and sell it not." Buy it, make it your own, assign it to its place in your system of thought, at whatever cost of laborious study, or effort at discrimination, or pain of parting with long cherished pre-judgments. "Sell it not"—part with it for no consideration, not even to acquire the credit in certain circles of being liberal and broad-minded.





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